

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212**

Environmental Assessment

Salida East Grazing Authorization, Permit Modification and New Range Improvements

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-0037 EA

April, 2014



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION.....	3
1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	3
1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE.....	9
1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW.....	9
1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES	11
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	12
2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL	12
2.2.1 Proposed Action.....	12
2.2.2 No Action Alternative.....	18
CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS	19
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	19
3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review	19
3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES.....	22
3.2.1 SOILS (includes a finding on standard 1).....	22
3.2.2 WATER (SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER, FLOODPLAINS)	23
3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	23
3.3.1 INVASIVE PLANTS*.....	23
3.3.2 VEGETATION (includes a finding on standard 3)	24
3.3.3 WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on standard 2).....	26
3.3.4 WILDLIFE AQUATIC (includes a finding on standard 3).....	28
3.3.5 WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on standard 3)	29
3.3.6 MIGRATORY BIRDS.....	30
3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT.....	31
3.4.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES	32
3.4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS	32
3.4.3 PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES	33
3.5 LAND RESOURCES	34
3.5.1 RANGE MANAGEMENT.....	34
3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY	35
CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION	36
4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS	36
4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED.....	36
ATTACHMENTS:.....	41

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:

Permit Authorization #0505573 Park Ditch, Hecla Junction West and Wellsville Allotments
Permit Authorization #0505613 Browns Canyon Allotment

PROJECT TITLE: Salida East New Grazing Authorization, Permit Modification and New Range Improvements

PLANNING UNIT: Arkansas River Subregion #1

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Browns Canyon Allotment: T51N, R8E, S. 35, T50N, R8E, S. 2 Public Acres: 1,159
Hecla Junction West Allotment: Hecla Junction West T51N, R8E, S. 22, 23, 26, 27, 34, & 35.
Public Acres: 1,520
Park Ditch Allotment: T50N, R8E, S.1,11,12,13,14, T50N, R9E, S.16-21 Public Acres: 3,000
Stone Bridge Allotment: T50N, R9E, S. 2 & 3 Public Acres: 80
Wellsville Allotment: T49N, R9E, S. 1-3, 10-12. T50N, R9E, S. 16, 21, 22, 27-29, 32-35
Public Acres: 6,797

APPLICANT:

Authorization #0505573 Everett Land & Cattle Co.
BLM

1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

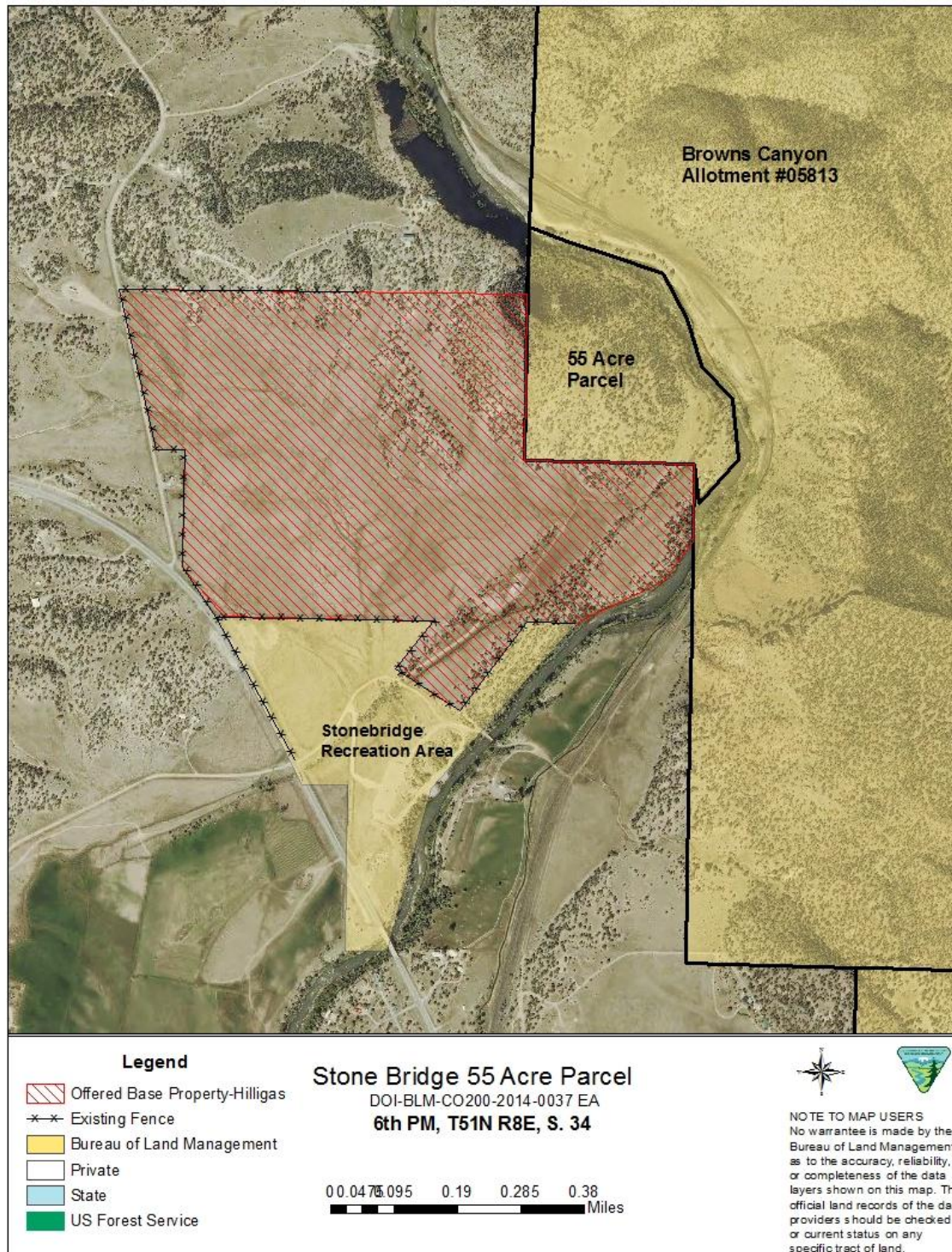
BACKGROUND: This EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze transfer of grazing preference and new grazing authorization, changes to the grazing schedule on the Wellsville Allotment and new range improvements on the Browns Canyon, Hecla Junction West and Park Ditch Allotments.

Review of grazing use on these allotments included an assessment of the “health” of public land in relation to Standards for Public Land Health and conformance with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado. All of the allotments analyzed in this EA were assessed in 2005 under the Browns / Salida Watershed Assessment.

Browns Canyon Allotment #05813

The Browns Canyon Allotment was previously analyzed in 2006 under CO-200-2006-0038 EA. A majority of the Browns Canyon allotment is located on the east side of the Arkansas River. There is a small parcel of BLM land (55 acres) located on the west side of the river and is also included as part of the Browns Canyon allotment. Even though this 55 acre parcel is authorized

for grazing under the Browns Canyon Allotment, the grazing permittee is not been able to use this parcel due to a lack in legal access. The 55 acre BLM parcel is adjacent to unfenced private lands owned by Skip Hilligas. Mr. Hilligas owns approximately 300 acres of pastureland and recently leased his private land to Brady Everett who is also a BLM grazing permittee on nearby allotments. The permittee for the Browns Canyon Allotment is willing to transfer a small portion of the grazing preference to the private land owned by Mr. Hilligas.



BLM reserves a water right from an existing spring located within the Browns Canyon Allotment (east side of the river). The spring is identified as the Chaffee County Spring South and is located in T51N R8E, Sec. 35, SW/4 SE/4. The BLM reserved water right is allocated for livestock and domestic use in the amount of 0.0014 cfs (about 1/2 gallon per minute) and decreed in case number 81 CW 143, District Court, Colorado Water Division 2. BLM intends to reserve this water right by developing the spring for livestock use.

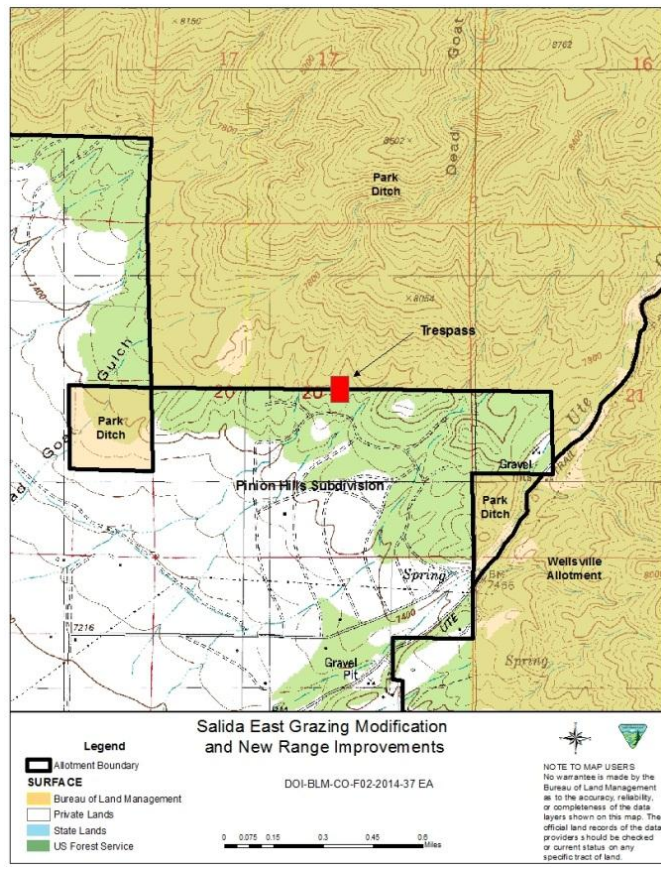
Hecla Junction West Allotment #05773

BLM reserves a water right from an existing spring located within the Hecla Junction West Allotment. The spring is identified as the Muck Spring located in T51N R8E, Sec. 22, NW/4 SE/4. The BLM reserved water right is allocated for livestock and domestic use in the amount of 0.0006 cfs (about 1/4 gallon per minute) and decreed in case number 81 CW 143, District Court, Colorado Water Division 2. BLM intends to reserve this water right by developing the spring for livestock use.

Park Ditch Allotment #05764

The Park Ditch Allotment was previously analyzed in 2000 under CO-200-2000-0016 EA and again renewed under CO-200-2008-0042 DNA in 2008. The allotment is categorized under Custodial management where there is no restriction to livestock numbers or season of use as long as the authorized amount of grazing use on public land within the pasture is not exceeded. Grazing use on this allotment is limited due to topography, dense forest cover, unfenced public/private land boundaries and recreation activity. As a result, grazing use primarily occurs on the gentle upland slopes adjacent to the private lands. The permittee utilizes this allotment during the winter period in conjunction with grazing on the adjacent unfenced private lands. The permittee, Everett Land & Cattle is currently developing a conservation plan with the Natural Resource Conservation Service on the adjacent private lands. As part of this plan, the permittee has identified several range improvements located on the BLM portion of this allotment that would supplement this conservation plan and includes new boundary fencing, water pipelines and stock tanks.

There are portions of the allotment boundary where fencing is inadequate and concern that livestock would drift off public land and create a hazard to nearby highway traffic. The permittee is requesting authorization to construct a new boundary fence along the boundary dividing BLM and the Pinion Hills subdivision. BLM requires that fencing be built on a surveyed boundary line as per BLM policy (IM No. 2006-113). In 2012, this boundary line was identified and posted by BLM Cadastral and in the process a trespass was identified. A skateboard ramp was built by a lot owner within the Pinion Hills Subdivision and partially extends onto the adjacent BLM lands. BLM Realty staff is currently dealing with the trespass structure.

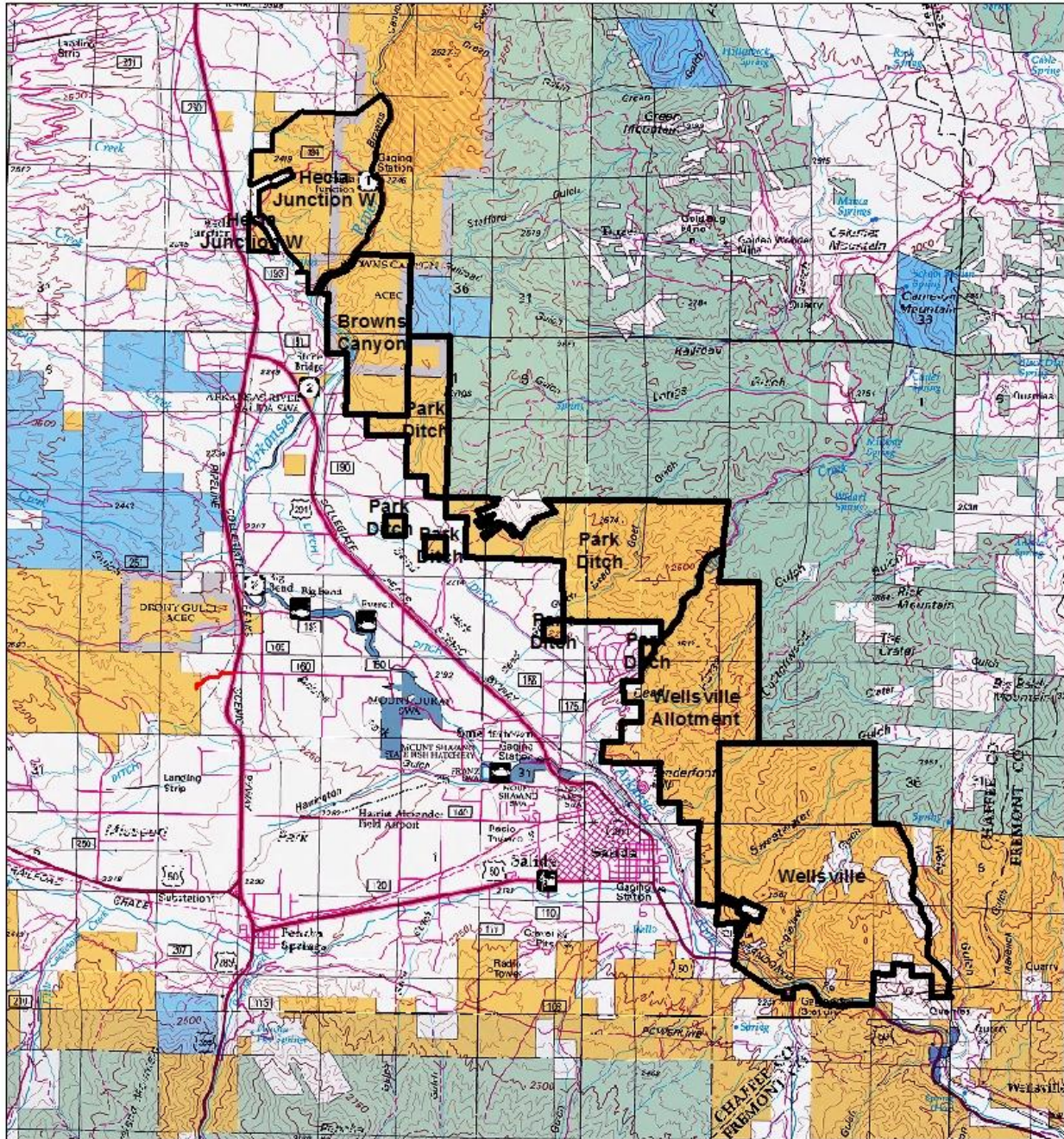


Wellsville Allotment #05807

The Wellsville Allotment is currently scheduled for grazing use from April 10 to May 31. The allotment was previously analyzed in 2000 under CO-200-2000-0016EA and again renewed in 2008 under CO-200-2008-0044 DNA. Grazing use on this allotment is limited due to topography, dense forest cover, unfenced public/private land boundaries and recreation activity. As a result, grazing use typically occurs on the gentle upland benches and secondary drainages along the Arkansas River between Salida and Wellsville.

The current scheduled grazing season (4/10 – 5/31) for this allotment contain potential issues with plant phenology and recreation conflicts. Repeated defoliation of early growing vegetation during the same time period year after year could promote a decline in plant community health over time. Another concern is the high amount of recreation use this allotment receives due to its proximity to the city of Salida. Over the years, the density in recreation has increased with the construction of new bicycle and hiking trails. Fishing activity along the Arkansas River during the spring and fall periods is another type of recreation usage which increased in recent years. There is concern that grazing/recreation conflicts could be the greatest during the current grazing schedule period (April 10 – May 31).

In response to these potential concerns, the permittee is requesting the authorization to change the grazing schedule from spring use to winter use on a permanent basis for the Wellsville Allotment. In 2011, a temporary change was authorized under CO-200-2012-0007 DNA to conduct a trial use changing the season of grazing on a portion of the Wellsville Allotment to winter use. Winter grazing occurred during the winter of 2012 and 2013. No issues were brought forward in response to this use.



Salida East Grazing Modification and New Range Improvements

Legend

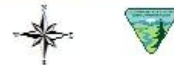
Allotment Boundary

SURFACE

- Bureau of Land Management
- Private Lands
- State Lands
- US Forest Service

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-37 EA

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles



NOTE TO MAP USERS

No warrantee is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the data layers shown on this map. The official land records of the data providers should be checked or current status on any specific tract of land.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to complete a site-specific evaluation of grazing use and new improvements that provides information to be analyzed by the BLM in conformance with the implementing regulations for the NEPA (40 CFR Part 1500), FLPMA, and Public Law 106-113 section 325 to determine whether changes are necessary to current management of the allotment to be in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act. The purpose of the action is also to ensure that all authorizations implement provisions of, and is in conformance with, the Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan (5-13-1996), and in conformance with the Secretary Approved Rangeland Health Standards for Colorado. The action is needed to respond to the changes in grazing authorization and new developments on BLM land.

1. This analysis is needed to consider the impacts of livestock grazing use on public lands within the respective allotment to determine if they are meeting the Standards for Public Land Health and are within the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing in Colorado.
2. Secondly, the proposed action is needed to ensure that grazing use continues to help the allotment meet Standards for Public Land Health and future grazing use on the allotment is consistent with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado.

1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to approve the proposed grazing modifications based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA will analyze impacts associated with modifying the grazing permits and the installation of new range improvements. The BLM may choose to: a) accept the project as proposed, b) accept the project with modifications/mitigation, c) accept an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not authorize the project at this time. The finding associated with this EA may not constitute the final approval for the proposed action.

1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/96

Decision Number/Page: 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 1-7, 1-8, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-6, 2-7, C-30, C-38, C-41, C-42, C-43, C-44

Decision Language:

- 1-2: Season of use and stocking rates will continue based on the Grazing EIS.
1-3: Livestock grazing will be prioritized based on IAP resolution of conflicts with riparian, critical wildlife habitat and ACESSs.
1-4: Grazing is authorized on 62 allotments.

1-7: Livestock drift onto uncontrolled private land will be eliminated through BLM fencing.
1-8: 25 allotments are categorized as Improve.
2-2: Season of use and stocking rates will continue based on the Grazing EIS and vegetation monitoring.
2-3: Livestock grazing will be prioritized based on IAP resolution of conflicts with riparian, critical wildlife habitat and ACESs.
2-4: Grazing is authorized on 35 allotments.
2-6: Livestock drift onto uncontrolled private land will be eliminated through BLM fencing.
C-30: Base livestock grazing management on the 1981 RGRA EIS.
C-38: Continue to construct range improvement projects on an as-needed basis.
C-41: Adjustments in grazing use will be made by allotment on a case by case basis. Changes in number of livestock, season of use, duration of use, and class of livestock can be made based on monitoring studies and inventory data.
C-42: The grazing treatment on Improve category allotments will require a rest standard to allow a time period for forage species to recover from the last grazing period before the plants are regrazed.
C-43: Maximum allowable utilization on allotments with rotational grazing or dormant season grazing will 80% annual production on grass species and 60% of annual production on shrub species.
C-44: On single pasture allotments with season long spring/summer grazing utilization will be held to the 40 to 60% range on forage species in lieu of a rest standard.

In January 1997, the BLM Colorado State Office approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES

1.5.1 Scoping: NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted: Scoping, by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office website, was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. No comments or issues were received from this scoping. Colorado Parks and Wildlife personnel were consulted and they responded with no issues to the proposed action. In November of 2011, scoping letters were sent to individual landowners who own property adjacent to the proposed boundary fence on the Park Ditch Allotment. The letter informed land owners that BLM may authorize the construction of the new fence on the existing boundary line. BLM received several responses from lot owners who own property along the proposed boundary fence.

Issues Identified:

- New fence would restrict BLM access.
- New fence would be a visual obstruction.
- New fence would harm wildlife.
- New fence would require landowners to remove structures currently located on the boundary line.
- New fence would block existing driveways.
- New fence would require trees to be removed.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are also discussed.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

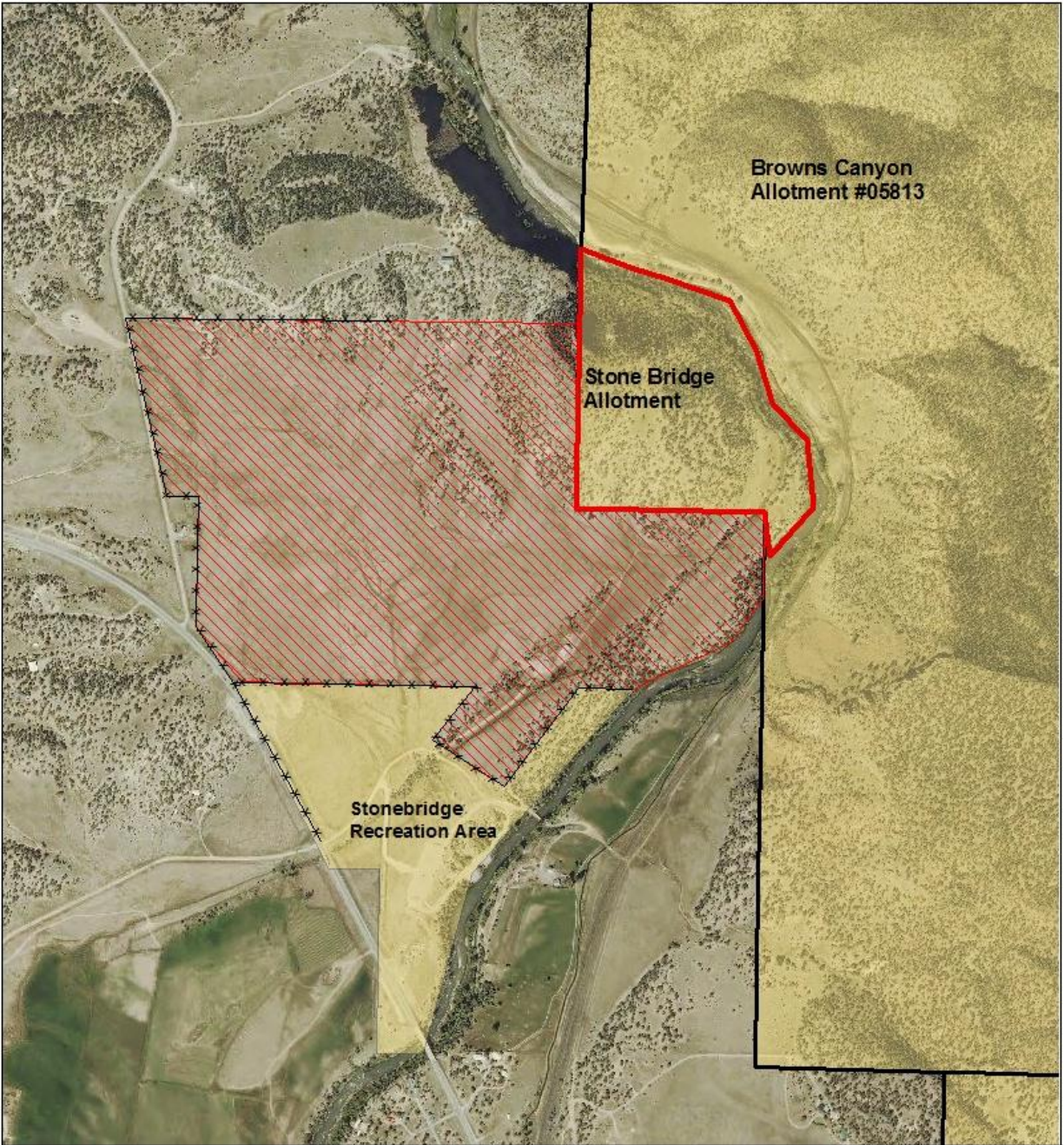
2.2.1 Proposed Action

The existing grazing permits would not be renewed under this proposal and instead would be renewed during their scheduled expiration dates. The Proposed Action authorizes the following activities:

1. Authorize splitting a small portion of the Browns Canyon Allotment to a new allotment and authorization.
2. Authorize the future development of the Chaffee County Spring South and Muck Spring located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotments.
3. Authorize the construction of the Pinion Hills boundary fence and water developments on the Park Ditch Allotment.
4. Authorize the change in the grazing season of use on the Wellsville Allotment.

Authorize splitting a small portion of the Browns Canyon Allotment to a new allotment and authorization.

The 55 acre BLM parcel would be transferred and assigned to a new allotment identified as the Stone Bridge Allotment. Seven AUMs would be transferred from the current base property associated with the Browns Canyon Allotment and assigned to base property offered by Skip Hilligas.



Legend

- Stone Bridge Allotment Boundary
- Offered Base Property-Hilligas
- x-x- Existing Fence
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State
- US Forest Service

Proposed Stone Bridge Allotment

DOI-BLM-CO200-2014-0037 EA

6th PM, T51N R8E, S. 34

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles



NOTE TO MAP USERS
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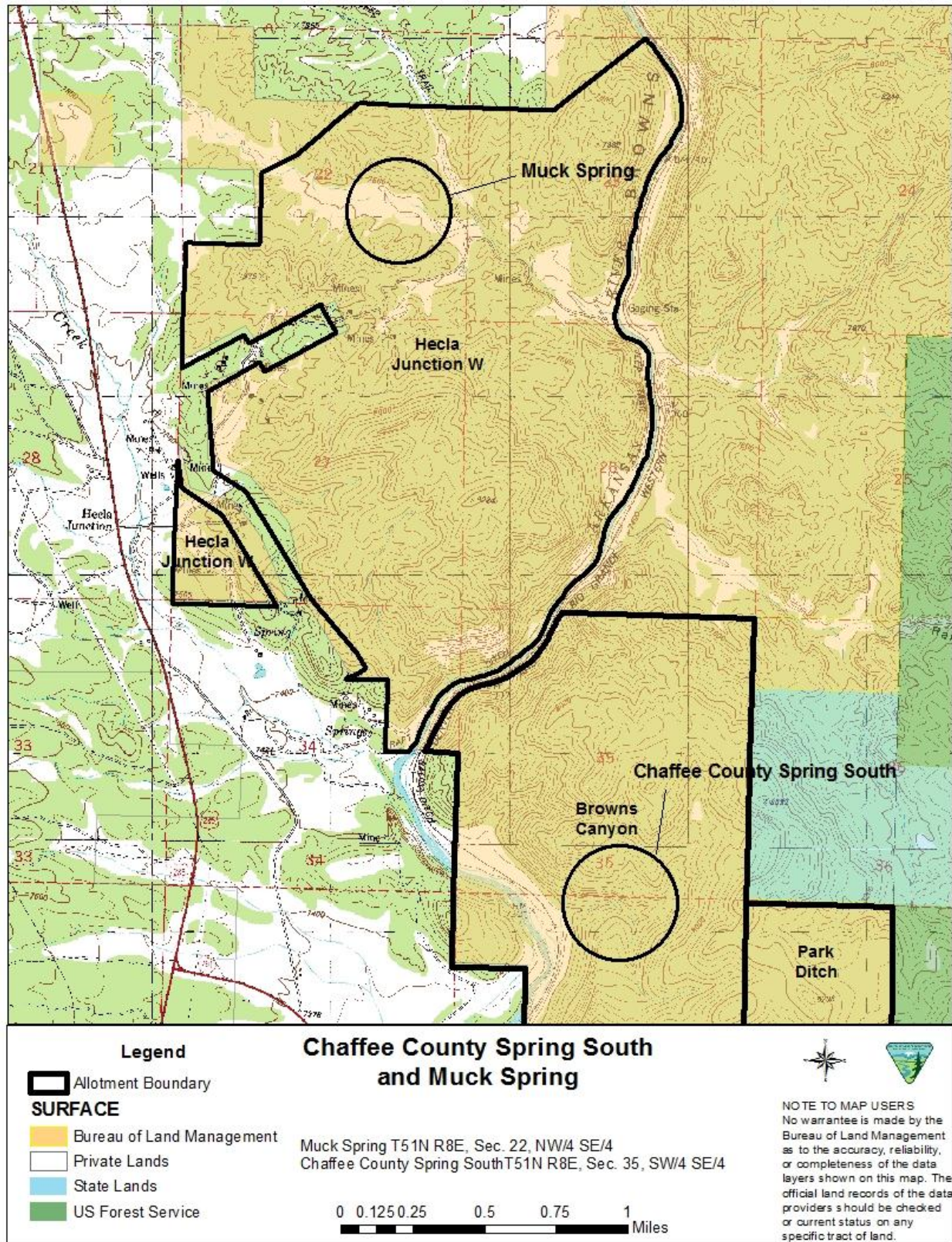
The new Stone Bridge Allotment would be managed under Custodial management with a season of use restriction to the winter period. A new grazing permit would be issued to Brady Everett for a term of ten years as follows:

<u>Allotment</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Grazing Period</u>		<u>% Public</u> <u>Land</u>	<u>Type</u> <u>Use</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
			<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>			
Stone Bridge	1	Cattle	10/1	3/31	100%	Custodial	6

The new permit/lease would contain the following Terms & Conditions:

1. Grazing use on the allotment is not restricted as to the numbers of livestock as long as the grazing use is in conjunction with the base property and utilization of forage on the public land is not exceeded.
2. Utilization on grass forage will not exceed 60% of the previous year's growth and 60% utilization will not be exceeded on the previous year's leader growth on woody and shrub species.
3. The permittee and all persons associated with the allotment operations shall not damage, destroy, remove, move or disturb any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological or scientific value, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils and artifacts. If, in connection with allotment operations under this authorization, any of the above resources are encountered, the permittee shall protect such resources and immediately notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings.
4. This Grazing Permit has been fully processed in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. The grazing schedule complies with Guidelines for Grazing Management in Colorado and is designed to help public land achieve Standards for Public Land Health.
In the event that the proposed grazing schedule fails to help public land achieve Standards for Public Land Health, grazing use on this allotment may be revised at any time.

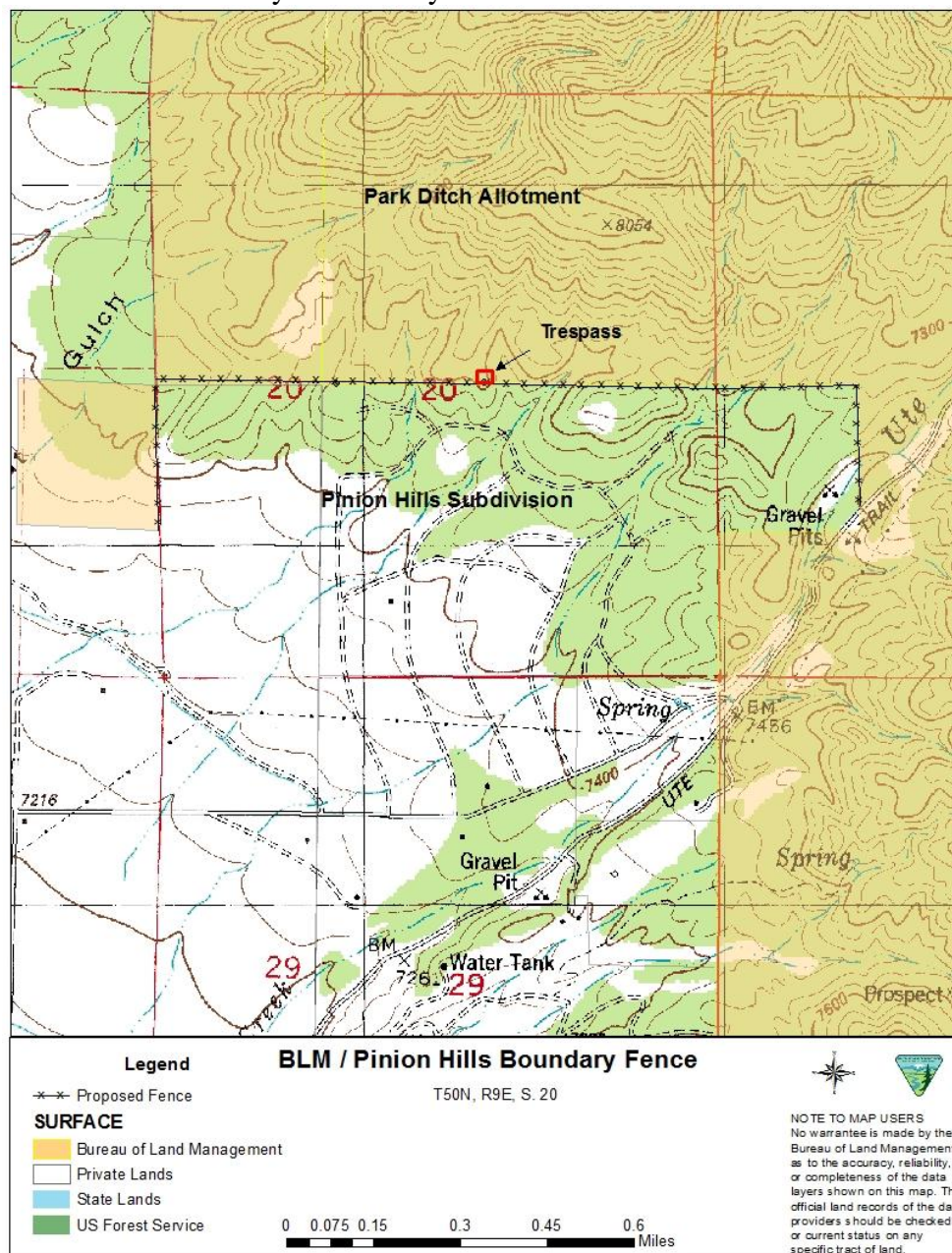
Authorize the future development of the Chaffee County Spring South and Muck Spring located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotments:



The proposed action is to authorize the future development of these two springs located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotment. Once the springs are ground surveyed and deemed feasible for development, a Determination of NEPA Adequacy would be conducted along with site specific review of the proposed development.

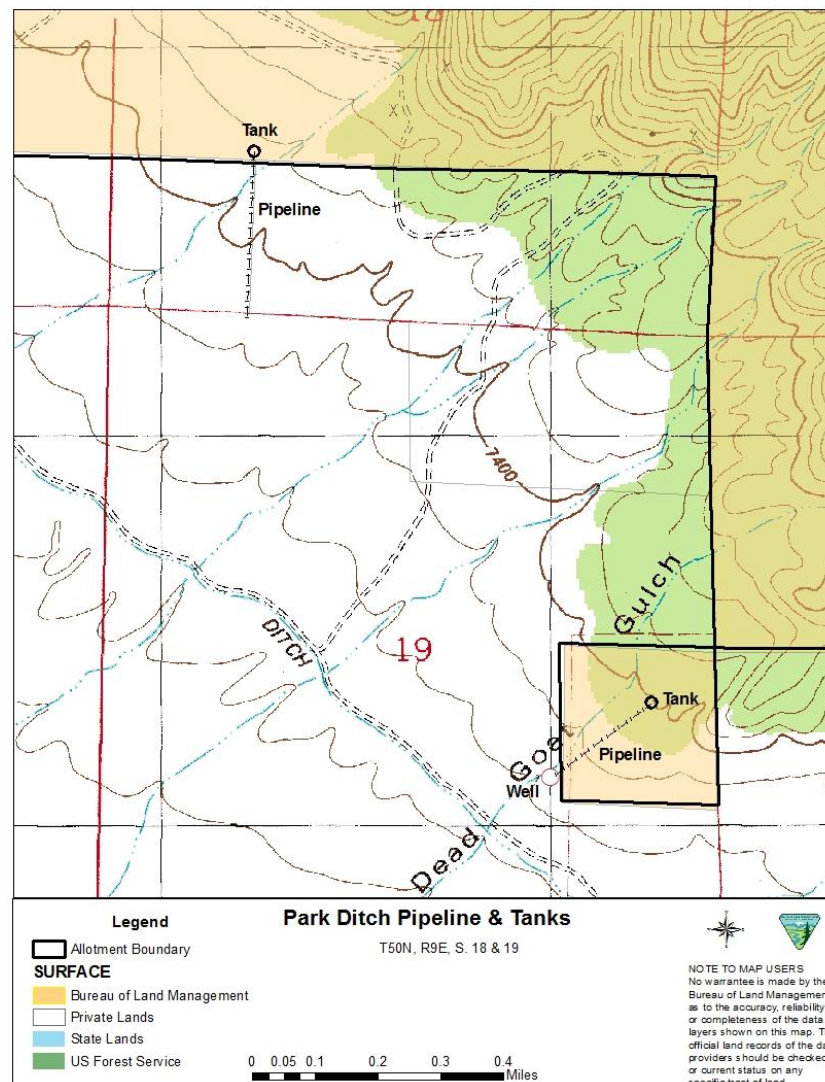
Authorize the construction of the Pinion Hills boundary fence and water developments on the Park Ditch Allotment:

The Pinion Hills boundary fence would be constructed on the surveyed private/BLM boundary as shown on the map. Initially the fence would be built directly around the trespass skate ramp. Once a resolution is reached on the trespass action and the object is removed, the fence would be relocated to the surveyed boundary line.



The fence would consist of a four strand fence using smooth wire on all four strands. The wire spacing would consist of the standard BLM wire spacing specification where the bottom wire is located 16 inches from ground level and the top wire is located 42 inches from ground level. The Pinion Hills Homeowners Association would be consulted on a location for a walk thru access gate where all subdivision owners would have legal walk thru access to BLM lands. The removal of pinyon trees would be limited to only when necessary. In most cases trees would be limbed using proper tree pruning techniques. Inmate labor may be used for construction of this new fence. No vegetation would be disturbed during bird nesting activities (May 15 – July 15). The grazing permittee would be responsible for future maintenance of this fence.

Two new water developments would be constructed as shown on the map. The pipeline would consist of 1 ½ black poly pipe buried at least 12 inches below the ground surface. The water tanks would be permanently set using 10 – 12 foot rubber tire tanks. The tanks will contain wildlife escape ramps. Water would be supplied by an existing well located on the permittees private land. An agreement between the BLM and grazing permittee would be completed for the water usage on BLM lands.



Authorize the change in the grazing season on the Wellsville Allotment:

The grazing season for the Wellsville Allotment would be changed from April 10 – May 31 to November 1 through March 31. Cattle use could occur at any time during this period, but actual use would be limited to the forage utilization restriction of 60% on the previous year's grass growth and leader growth on woody and shrub plants.

2.2.2 No Action Alternative

This alternative would not authorize the new grazing authorization or any of the modifications or new developments as discussed in the Proposed Action.

CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review

The following table is provided as a mechanism for resource staff review, to identify those resource values with issues or potential impacts from the proposed action and/or alternatives. Those resources identified in the table as impacted or potentially impacted will be brought forward for analysis.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Air Quality</u> <i>Ty Webb, Chad Meister, Melissa Hovey</i>	TW, 10/20/14	This action will not negatively impact air quality within the region.
<u>Geology/Minerals</u> <i>Stephanie Carter, Melissa Smeins</i>	SSC, 5/27/14	There are geologic and mineral resources present; however, this project should not have impacts to the resource. A majority of these areas are open to location under the Mining Law and are also subject to provisions of the Mineral Materials Law, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable.
<u>Soils</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 11/4/14	See Soils section
<u>Water Resources</u> <u>Surface and Ground</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 11/4/14	See Water Resources section
<u>Invasive Plants</u> <i>John Lamman</i>	JL, 06/06/2014	See Invasive plants section
<u>T&E and Sensitive Species</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 5/20/2014	Peregrine falcons are no longer a T&E species but are considered BLM sensitive species. Peregrine falcons could be expected to use the project area but there are no known eyries in the analysis area. A golden eagle nest is present within the Stone Bridge allotment, but the proposed action will not cause an adverse effect. There are no known records of BLM sensitive plant species in the area. No impacts are anticipated to TES Species based on analysis of the proposed action.
<u>Vegetation</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW, 4/15/14	See Vegetation section.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Wetlands and Riparian</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG 4/30/14	See Wetlands and Riparian section.
<u>Wildlife Aquatic</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG 4/30/14	See Aquatic Wildlife section.
<u>Wildlife Terrestrial</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 5/20/2014	See Terrestrial Wildlife section.
<u>Migratory Birds</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 5/20/2014	See Migratory Bird section.
<u>Cultural Resources</u> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MDT, 4/23/14	See Cultural Resources section below
<u>Native American Religious Concerns</u> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MDT, 4/23/14	See Cultural Resources section below
<u>Economics</u> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw,10/14/ 14	This action will not result in significant impacts to the socio economics of the region. Economic repercussions could occur to the permittee should grazing permit not be granted.
<u>Paleontology</u> <i>Melissa Smeins, Stephanie Carter</i>	Mjs, 10/30/2014	See Paleontological Resources section below.
<u>Visual Resources</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 5/12/2014	Actions identified in the proposed action would introduce very minor contrasts in the existing landscape and are consistent with existing improvements that are generally accepted by the public. Fence lines and other range improvements are characteristic of the area are generally accepted landscape modifications. Due to the relative minor contrast introduced by the proposed action and the general acceptance of these types of structures additional analysis of impacts to visual resources is not warranted.
<u>Environmental Justice</u> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw,10/14/ 14	The proposed action affects areas that are rural in nature. The land adjacent to these parcels is open rangeland; as a result, there are no minority or low-income populations in or near the project area. As such, the proposal will not have a disproportionately high or adverse environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.
<u>Wastes Hazardous or Solid</u> <i>Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 5/27/14	The proposed action should not have negative impacts involving wastes.
<u>Recreation</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 5/12/2014	Under current management there have been no known reported conflicts between grazing and recreation use within the project area. The proposed action would further reduce the potential for conflicts in the area by switching to winter use when less recreation use occurs. Due to this minor change no further analysis of impacts to recreation use is warranted.
<u>Farmlands Prime and Unique</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW 5/27/14	Not present.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Lands and Realty</u> <i>Rich Rotte, Greg Valladares</i>	RAR, 10/21/14	Proposed structures are not adjacent to recorded authorizations. Recorded authorizations are for a railroad (COC 0 94000), two ditches (COC 52540, COC 74102), and a county road (COC 35148).
<u>Wilderness, WSAs, ACECs, Wild & Scenic Rivers</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 5/12/2014	A portion of the proposed action is within the Brown's Canyon WSA and the Brown's Canyon ACEC. Actions identified are administrative in nature and would not affect the wilderness qualities of the WSA and therefore further analysis is not warranted.
<u>Wilderness Characteristics</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 5/12/2014	Portions of the Browns Canyon allotment and the Park Ditch allotment are in areas found to possess wilderness characteristics per the updated inventory conducted in 2013. The structures identified in the proposed action are not within the areas with wilderness characteristics therefore there would be impact to this resource and further analysis is not needed.
<u>Range Management</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW, 4/15/14	See Range Section
<u>Forest Management</u> <i>Ken Reed</i>	KR, 4/15/14	No impacts to forest health or forest management.
<u>Cadastral Survey</u> <i>Jeff Covington</i>	JC, 11/3/2014	Fence improvements need to be located on the BLM boundary Protection of Survey Corner and Boundary Line Markers (WO IM No. 2011-122).
<u>Noise</u> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw,10/14/ 14	This action will not result in any significant impacts due to noise or result in any increased noise levels.
<u>Fire</u> <i>Ty Webb</i>	TW, 10/20/14	This action will not result in any significant impacts to fire or result in any increased fire activities.

The affected resources brought forward for analysis include:

Wetlands and Riparian
Wildlife Aquatic
Wildlife Terrestrial
Migratory Birds
Cultural Resources
Native American Religious Concerns
Paleontology
Range Management
Soils
Water Resources
Invasive Plants
Vegetation

3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 SOILS (includes a finding on standard 1)

Affected Environment:

Soils in the analysis area are mainly classified as: Rock Outcrop, Rockland, or Rough Broken Land and are essentially ungrazable. The grazable areas where forage and terrain are accessible to livestock are mainly along the public/private boundary at the margins of the valley bottom. Soils in this area vary, but are mainly dominated by the Cotopaxi loamy Sand, 3-9% slopes.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Proposed Action contains five main items that would affect soil resources:

1. 1,110 feet of boundary fencing along the County road Right-of-Way
2. Development of two springs
3. Boundary fence construction along the public/private land boundary
4. Water development with construction of pipelines and two tanks
5. Grazing itself

Overall, impacts to soils would be minor and mostly temporary. Soil disturbance would be related to the construction phase of the fencing and water developments. This disturbance would be minor to start with and be quick to recover as vegetation returns. There may be some long term trampling around the stock tanks after they are functioning. This impact would be localized and concentrated to a small area. Finally, the impact of the grazing itself on the soils would also be minor. The allotments in question are relatively small and interspersed with private lands where most of the forage is located. The grazing utilization criteria being proposed would be adequate to protect soils.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: No further mitigation would be required.

Cumulative Impacts:

The Proposed Action would be cumulative over what is already happening along the Arkansas River. Currently, most of the impact to soils in this area is related to recreation along the river. The addition of these changes would have an immeasurable impact on the soils in the area as a whole.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: If no action is taken, conditions would remain as they currently are and no additional impact to soils is anticipated.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Upland Soils: Currently, soils are meeting standards. The Proposed Action is anticipated to maintain this status.

3.2.2 WATER (SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER, FLOODPLAINS) (includes a finding on standard 5)

Affected Environment:

The Proposed Action would take place along and near the Arkansas River. The Arkansas River in this area is currently not identified as being water quality impaired. Most of the grazing use occurs on upland benches above the Arkansas River due to the steep slopes and rock.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Proposed Action would construct four water developments, two boundary fences and adjust grazing in two areas. Most of this use would occur in dry upland areas separated from water. Water quality impacts related to each of these would be very minor.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: No mitigation would be required.

Cumulative Impacts: The Proposed Action would be cumulative over what is already happening along the Arkansas River. Currently, most of the impact to water in this area is related to recreation along the river and historical mining upstream. The addition of these changes would have an immeasurable impact on the water quality in the area as a whole.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: If no action is taken, conditions would remain as they currently are and no additional impact to water is anticipated.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Water Quality: Currently, water quality is meeting standards. The Proposed Action is anticipated to maintain this status.

3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.3.1 INVASIVE PLANTS*

Affected Environment:

Invasive plants known to occur within 7 miles of the project boundary include, but are not limited to: Canada thistle, diffuse knapweed Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, salt cedar, downy brome, leafy spurge, myrtle spurge, white top, yellow toadflax, and elongated mustard.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The impacts from the type of grazing proposed in this alternative would not result in the type of soil disturbance needed to increase the risk of invasive plant invasion. Livestock can transport invasive plant seeds clinging to fur and contained in their digestive system.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Allotments would be monitored by BLM staff and grazing permittees for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list A and B. Identified noxious weeds will be treated.

Cumulative Impacts: The impacts of the proposed action when considered in addition to the existing surface disturbing activities in the general area would not increase the risk of noxious weed invasion.

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Removal of livestock grazing from the allotments in the proposed action could allow some populations of invasive plants to increase in size.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Allotments would be monitored by BLM staff for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list A and B. Identified noxious weeds would be treated.

Cumulative Impacts: The impacts of the proposed action when considered in addition to the existing noxious weeds in the general area would not increase the risk of noxious weed invasion.

*Invasive plants are plants that are not part of (if exotic), or are a minor component of (if native), the original plant community or communities that have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the site if their future establishment and growth are not actively controlled by management interventions, or are classified as exotic or noxious plants under state or federal law. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants.

3.3.2 VEGETATION (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment:

The elevation for the allotments range from 7,000 to 8,500 feet. The climate is semi-arid with precipitation averaging 12 to 18 inches annually. Typically the average frost free period is 107 days where the highest precipitation occurs during July and August. The months of December and January are typically the driest.

This analysis focuses on five grazing allotments in the Salida area that are in close proximity. In general four range sites are commonly found in these allotments and include Pinyon-Juniper, Sandy Bench, Dry Mountain Outwash and Boulder Flats.

The Pinyon-Juniper range site for these allotments is an association of species including pinyon pine as the dominant woodland type and juniper as a secondary woodland type occurring

intermittently due to the upper elevation limits. The mid and under-story levels consists of shrubs, forbs and grasses. Forbs and shrubs that may occur in the area include mountain mahogany, wax current, fringed sagebrush, rabbit brush, and yucca. Primary grasses typically found on these sites are blue grama, mountain muhly, Sand Dropseed, Pine Dropseed and Indian rice grass.

The Sandy Bench site occurs as a grassland-forb-shrub aspect. The dominant grasses include Indian Rice Grass, Needle-and-Thread, and Western Wheatgrass. Forbs and shrubs include Golden Pea, Scarlet Globe mallow, Yarrow, Buckwheat, Fringed sage, Prickly pear, and Yucca.

The Dry Mountain Outwash site is dominated by grass with isolated and scattered forbs and shrubs in small amounts. The dominant grasses found on this site include Junegrass, Western Wheatgrass, Indian Ricegrass, Needle-and-Thread, and Blue Grama. Forbs and shrub plants include fringed sagebrush, buckwheat, tall rabbit brush, yucca, prickly pear cactus, and wax current.

The Boulder Flats is a grass dominated site. The dominant grasses that occur on the site include Indian Ricegrass, Needle-and-Thread, and Western Wheatgrass. Shrubs include wax current and fringed sage. Pinyon pine occurs as a very minor component of the site.

The south parcel (23 acre) of the proposed Stone Bridge allotment contains crested wheatgrass and makes up approximately 20 – 30% of the total plant community. This species is introduced and is not part of the native plant community in the area. It is assumed that crested wheatgrasses was planted when the parcel was under private ownership.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed action will have minimal direct impacts to vegetation on these allotments. The new range improvements including water structures and fences will have some degree of short term impact initially through construction activities, but the long term benefits of improving livestock distribution will outweigh any short term consequences. The vegetation impacted by construction activities will naturally re-establish with proper grazing management.

Authorizing grazing use on the Stone Bridge Allotment will not have any negative impacts to vegetation in this area. The proposed grazing schedule limits grazing use to the dormant period of vegetative growth when plants will have full opportunity for growth during the growing season. The utilization restrictions will ensure enough plant stubble is left for soil moisture retention, litter accumulation and soil stability.

The new season of use on the Wellsville Allotment will benefit vegetation in the long term. Changing the grazing schedule to dormant season grazing will allow plants to have full opportunity for growth and seed dissemination. The utilization restrictions will

ensure enough plant stubble is left for soil moisture retention, litter accumulation and soil stability.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: See Cumulative Impact Summary

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not authorizing new water structures and boundary fence will have no negative impacts to vegetation initially. However, not having adequate water on the allotments could lead to poor livestock distribution and potential for uneven grazing use patterns that could lead to over utilization.

Not authorizing grazing use on the two BLM parcels could lead to long term impacts. Plant biomass is produced annually on these sites, litter and “standing dead” plant material tend to accumulate relatively quickly and creates an impermeable layer that restricts new plant growth and regeneration. As this occurs, plants tend to lose both nutrition and forage quality values. In addition, plant cover tends to decrease over time. Livestock grazing, when managed properly, tends to harvest plant biomass and return a higher portion of the nutrients to the soil (and more quickly) than allowing the plant to slowly decompose without grazing use.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: The allotments were evaluated for Public Land Health Standards in 2005. The assessment indicated that, under current management, livestock grazing does not appear to be preventing public land from meeting applicable land health standards. The Proposed Action would help these allotments to continue and achieve these standards.

3.3.3 WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on standard 2)

Affected Environment:

This grouping of sub-activities under the Proposed Action has direct overlap with riparian resources only along the Arkansas River at the southern end of Browns Canyon and downstream of Salida. Both places are the first public land river parcels encountered leaving outward of the Salida region. The Arkansas River in-between is in predominately private with some state of Colorado ownership for about 10 miles in the area of Salida. The private land was settled early in Colorado’s history and there have been extensive alterations. By proximity, public land nearby was also utilized and permanent alterations remain by way of ditches, railroads, roads, trails, etc. adjacent to the river. Grazing and trailing of livestock on these public lands had been established historically, but not recently on the parcel west of Stone Bridge. There is an abrupt land form change when entering public land where rugged topography was not desirable for homesteading. The roughness has helped sustain the narrow band of riparian in near native condition, even when adjacent to the permanent disturbances mentioned. The riparian community is naturally

limited in area by high rock content river banks and swift annual runoff that restricts soil deposition needed for growing plants. Where suited though a cottonwood, willow, evergreen tree, birch and alder community occurs between rock interrupted spaces. There is also a stable and diverse understory of herbaceous vegetation along the river margins, but many introduced species are included in that community. There is also wetland vegetation supported by irrigation ditch flow on the west 55 acre Browns Canyon parcel. On the discussed springs, present RGFO staffs have no local site knowledge. Baseline information is lacking other than their know locations from wilderness inventory activities. Typical springs for that area would be a small amount of ground water forced to the surface at a geologic rock outcrop in the lower elevation of a drainage way. A small wetland area can sustain prior to flow re-entering sands. RGFO field crews will inventory these springs in the next field season.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Cattle grazing of riparian vegetation in the 55 acre west Browns Canon parcel is essentially a new action since that land was unavailable to grazing in the recent past. Grazing on the down river parcels has been occurring. Both site specific riparian areas are deemed to be in good condition by RGFO staff given the permanent changes the Arkansas River as a whole has undergone (travel routes, ditches, etc.). Trailing and erosion caused by livestock is limited because of the rocky nature of the overall area. Livestock use patterns along the Arkansas River in these areas and other allotments tends to be away from the riparian due to ruggedness at rivers edge so vegetation use and trampling is generally light. The months of use proposed for both areas (dormant season) will further limit livestock from seeking wetland plants at the river margin and grazing will tend to be on upland terraces. Spring developments discussed in the Proposed Action, if done, should be completed to sustain site characteristics so impacts should be negligible, but planned work would need to be further analyzed at the DNA stage of a spring development action. At present, the proposal to identify these for potential development will not have an immediate impact. Spring protection Best Management Practices, (BMP)s would guide future development planning and impact analysis.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Livestock management BMP's to place salt away from water and monitor for weed spread and new weed introductions in the riparian areas should be included for these allotments because of the added spread risks the river brings through seed dispersal.

Cumulative Impacts: Grazing livestock on these public lands is cumulative to other multiple uses along the Arkansas River which is very heavily used by public recreationists. Grazing in the manor of the proposed action however will sustain riparian function as plants retain the entire growing season to maintain their vigor and trampling and erosion is not a substantial issue.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: There would be no change and no new direct impacts to analyze; however grazing up to May 31 under the existing situation is less preferable than the proposed dormant season plan. Conflicts and other reasons are behind proposed new dates; however, the proposed action better meets riparian management objectives than the current action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: No additional mitigation measures are suggested.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Riparian Systems: Present conditions in areas of riparian overlap are meeting the Riparian Land Health Standards. The Proposed Action or No Action Alternative sustain meeting the riparian standard.

3.3.4 WILDLIFE AQUATIC (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment:

See Riparian section above; aquatic resources are the Arkansas River adjacent to riparian, within an irrigation ditch, and potentially at the spring locations.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The protection of the riparian as discussed in that section will sustain quality aquatic conditions. There are no substantial separate, aquatic only, issues with the Proposed Action that differ from those discussed in the riparian section and most grazing use will be in uplands away from riverside riparian.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Same as for the riparian analysis.

Cumulative Impacts: Similar as for the riparian analysis.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: There would be no change proposed and no new direct impacts to analyze; however grazing up to May 31 under the existing situation at Wellsville is less preferable than the Proposed Action dormant season plan as discussed in the riparian section. There is also more interaction between amphibians and livestock after April. The separation by time in the Proposed Action therefore is slightly more preferable to this No Action Alternative, but likely negligible because habitat is riverine rather than standing water where amphibians would congregate.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None recommended beyond common allotment monitoring.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: Aquatic wildlife and habitat is sustained under alternative.

3.3.5 WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment:

Several habitat types are found within the area covered by these allotments. At lower elevations and/or south facing slopes the habitat types are primarily pinyon pine and juniper. Open areas of mountain grassland are interspersed throughout the area and mountain shrubs such as currant and mountain mahogany are abundant, especially on south slopes. Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found at higher elevations in the project area. These sites are very dry and warm areas, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. Mature ponderosa pine forests on dry sites are open, with mature trees achieving wide separation as they compete for limited soil moisture. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir.

Mule deer are likely present throughout the year; however, of importance is severe winter range along the eastern edge of allotments. Severe winter range, as stated by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, is that part of the range of a species where 90 percent of the individuals are located when the annual snowpack is at its maximum and/or temperatures are at a minimum in the two worst winters out of ten. Elk and bighorn sheep are also likely found within the project boundary.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Impacts to terrestrial species from grazing use proposed in this assessment will be minimal. The allotments being assessed in this document are utilized by deer, elk and bighorn sheep as yearlong habitat. All of the allotments in this assessment contain large areas of unsuitable range, those areas where topography restrict use by livestock. Much of the spatially mapped winter range is unsuitable for livestock grazing. These areas essentially remain as wildlife habitat with no domestic livestock grazing. The proposed scheduled grazing periods will have little effect on vegetation utilized by wildlife. Water developments, while not necessary for wildlife management, will likely be used by many species of terrestrial vertebrates.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Any tank, new or existing, will have a wildlife escape ramp to prevent drowning of terrestrial species.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: Ultimately, any grazing removes resources that would have been available to wildlife communities, but if managed properly, plant communities may sustain their productivity providing resources to both

wild and domestic fauna. The proposed action is reflective the Bureau's multiple use mission and it is not expected to negatively impact the public land health standards for plant and animals communities.

3.3.6 MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment:

See the terrestrial wildlife section for a site description. The following birds are listed on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) – 2002 List for BCR 16-Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau. These species have been identified as species that may be found in the project area, have declining populations and should be protected from habitat alterations.

The golden eagle is a bird of grasslands, shrublands, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and ponderosa pine forests, but may occur in most other habitats occasionally, especially in winter. Nests are placed on cliffs and sometimes in trees in rugged areas, and breeding birds range widely over surrounding habitats.

Flammulated owls prefer old-growth or mature ponderosa pine, apparently due to the presence of large broken-top and lightning-damaged snags and trees for nesting cavities, large cavities excavated by northern flickers and other woodpeckers, open structure of trees and understory for foraging, and high prey availability. They will utilize other habitats with similar structure, such as open mixed-conifer and aspen forests. Key habitat features seem to be the presence of large trees and snags, scattered clusters of shrubs or saplings, clearings, and a high abundance of nocturnal arthropod prey.

Northern harriers reside throughout Colorado, with highest densities on the eastern plains, mountain parks, and western valleys. These hawks feed on small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. They hunt by flying low over wetlands, grasslands, shrublands, and croplands.

Prairie and peregrine falcons nest in scattered locations throughout the state where they inhabit cliff/rock habitat types. These falcons breed on cliffs and rock outcrops, and their diet during the breeding season is a mix of passerines and small mammals.

Williamson's sapsuckers breed in forested regions and in Colorado populations are concentrated along the eastern edge of the Rockies. Williamson's sapsuckers nest primarily in ponderosa pine and in aspen components of mixed-conifer. They often place nest cavities in aspen trees, and often choose nest trees in aspen stands adjacent to open ponderosa pine or mixed-conifer forest.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The results of several studies debating grazing versus non-grazing impacts to migratory birds remains mixed. If grazing is managed correctly, long-term benefits may be an increase in plant species diversity, plant vigor, and reduction of excessive vegetation litter. Over grazing reduced cover of grasses, facilitating establishment of pinyon- juniper seedlings and simultaneously reducing ground fires that

otherwise might eliminate woody vegetation. The change in herbaceous structure caused a change in migratory bird species occupancy by negatively affecting species dependent on herbaceous and shrubby cover or species that require open savannahs, but positively affecting species requiring closed canopy systems. Currently, BLM's standards for public land health do not allow for excessive grazing that would alter forest structure in the manner historical grazing regimes may have.

Grazing has a strong influence on abundance and species richness of migratory birds. Research evidence suggests that every type of North American grassland community includes a fauna of grazing-tolerant or grazing-dependent species, and another equally intolerant of grazing. Neotropical migratory birds fall into both groups. Therefore, while grazing may be a detriment to one species, it is beneficial to another. Riparian areas are of extreme importance for migratory birds in the arid southwest. The highest densities of breeding birds in all of North America have been reported from southwestern riparian woodlands. In these allotments, the riparian communities are generally in good condition, and will likely continue to meet standards. Grazing will not in itself create a "take" situation for migratory birds, meeting the requirements of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. If grazing stipulations continue to be followed, implementing the Proposed Action will likely have no measurable effect on migratory bird species or their habitat.

The only known raptor nest to occur on the project site occurs within the proposed Stone Bridge Allotment. This golden eagle nest occurs in cliff habitat that is inaccessible to cattle and will likely impact by proposed activities.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: In order for BLM to be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, requiring that BLM avoid actions that "take" migratory birds, it is recommended that all vegetation disturbances be avoided from May 15 thru July 15. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. Construction and maintenance of allotment infrastructure that may take migratory birds and/or nests should be completed outside the primary nesting season of May 15 thru July 15.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: There would be no new impacts with regards to the no action alternative. However, the proposed action is preferred because cattle would not be present during the primary migratory bird nesting season, minimizing the probability of nest disturbance and/or destruction.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment:

Prehistoric sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect [see Reports CR-RG-14-024 (P) and CR-RG-14-112 (N)]. Although 5CF2939 and 5CF2940 were recorded during the cultural resources inventory, they are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and do not qualify as historic properties. Therefore, no historic properties will be affected by the proposed undertaking.

Additionally, pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted within grazing allotments slated for administrative changes (Browns Canyon, Stone Bridge, and Wellsville), and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment areas. Based on the information collected during the literature review, it was determined that no historic properties would be impacted by the proposed undertaking.

Lastly, the proposed action includes an authorization the future development of two springs located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotments. However, the specific locations of the springs have not been determined, and will be analyzed specifically in one or more forthcoming Determinations of NEPA Adequacy. Accordingly, the specific location of the springs and the potential for cultural resources and subsequent impacts will be analyzed at that time.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Other Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

Affected Environment:

Although aboriginal sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect, no possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see Cultural

Resources section, above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Other Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.4.3 PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment:

The upper Arkansas River valley contains tertiary and quaternary deposits that represent terrestrial environments of the past overlain by glacial gravels deposited during glacial retreat. These rocks have potential to contain paleontological resources. Glacial Gravels are typically Class 3 paleontologic resources while the tertiary Dry Union Formation is rated as high as Class 5 (WO-IM 2008-009 "Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) System for Paleontological Resources on Public Lands"). The valley is bounded by the crystalline rocks of the Sawatch and Mosquito mountain ranges.

All of the allotments primarily contain crystalline rocks that have a very low potential for paleontological resources. The westernmost portions of the Park Ditch and Wellsville allotments do contain glacial gravels that overlie the tertiary dry union formation and therefore the proposed actions in these areas will require mitigation to protect paleontological resources.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct impacts to or destruction of fossils would occur from unmitigated activities conducted on formations with high potential for important scientific fossil resources. Indirect impacts would involve damage or loss of fossil resources due to the unauthorized collection of scientifically important fossils by workers or the public due to increased access to fossil localities in the Project Area. Adverse impacts to important fossil resources would be long-term and significant since fossils removed or destroyed would be lost to science.

Cumulative Impacts: Although the project area does not contain any known fossil resources, there is a possibility that ground disturbing work in the area may uncover fossil resources. Adverse significant impacts to paleontological resources can be reduced to a negligible level through mitigation of ground disturbing activities. It is possible that the proposed project would have the beneficial impact that ground disturbance activities might result in the discovery of important fossil resources.

Mitigation/Residual Effects: In order to prevent potential impacts to paleontologic resources, a stipulation will be attached to the permit(s) that directs the holder to notify the BLM RGFO immediately if any vertebrate fossils or their traces are discovered during operations within the permitted area. Operations may continue as long as the fossil specimen would not be damaged or destroyed by the activity. Within 5 working days of notification, the BLM RGFO shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries and shall notify the operator what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries. This stipulation should be proficient to protect paleontological resources that may be encountered on all but one allotment:

Park Ditch Allotment #05764-A pre-work field survey was conducted on October 29, 2014 because the proposed fence is located within the Class 5 Dry Union Formation that is likely to contain paleontologic resources. There were no paleontological resources identified on the surface in the vicinity of the proposed fence line, however there is still a chance that paleontological resources may be found during ground disturbing activity associated with installation of the fence. The stipulation shall apply that if any paleontological resources are found during construction, the BLM RGFO shall be notified immediately.

Spring development on this allotment is not as likely to encounter paleontologic resources and therefore a pre-work survey will not be required for this part of the proposal, however the stipulation shall apply that if any paleontological resources are found during construction, the BLM RGFO shall be notified immediately.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The no action alternative would not affect paleontological resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:

3.5 LAND RESOURCES

3.5.1 RANGE MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment:

See Chapter 1.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Implementing the proposed water and fence developments will serve as a tool to better control livestock grazing use patterns and promote use to areas that typically would not be grazed. Adjusting the season of use on the Wellsville allotment will reduce the chances of conflict between livestock and recreation users. Winter grazing is also a period when cows are not paired with a calf and cattle tend to utilize forage further away from water sources. Authorizing new grazing use on the Stone Bridge allotment will promote better quality forage and maintain a healthy plant community under proper management. It will also help deter potential unauthorized use of the area.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: See summary.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not implementing the water and fence developments restricts the ability to utilize the forage on the allotment and limits the ability to control livestock. Not having a boundary fence behind Pinion Hills subdivision causes risk of livestock interactions with homeowners and vehicle traffic. This also created a public safety hazard to the area. While Colorado is a fence out state where adjacent private land owners are responsible for fencing their boundaries, the permittee is being proactive by taking the initiative to control his livestock and promote orderly public range management.

Not authorizing grazing use on the Stone Bridge allotment results in an economic impact to the lessee on the adjacent private lands. Under this alternative, no grazing would be authorized on the allotment. Since not all the public land is fenced separate from the private land, the lessee would be responsible for fencing approximately 1 mile of the unfenced portions. The cost associated with fencing one mile of boundary is \$6,000. In addition, economic impacts would be experienced by the permittee due to the loss of pasture under this alternative. Based on the permittees' anticipated need to provide additional pasture to make up for the loss of public land grazing use, the permittee could be expected to experience additional cost annually under this alternative.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY

The geographic scope of cumulative impacts is the area described as the Arkansas River Eco-Sub-region in the Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan. Within this area, BLM manages approximately 124,887 acres of public land. The area also consists of approximately 126,300 acres of private and 9,941 acres of state land. Livestock grazing has been a major component in this area since settlement and is integral to the local economy. Grazing

management as prescribed on public lands is more intensive than management of the surrounding private and state lands and takes other resource values, such as wildlife, cultural, soils, vegetative and riparian on the public land into account to a greater degree. The proposed action includes protection for vegetative, soils, cultural and riparian values. These standards assure sufficient residual vegetation to protect soil from wind and water erosion and allow adequate seed dissemination and seedling establishment. Therefore, the impacts of the proposed action on the allotments in this assessment, together with those of other similar BLM actions within the sub-region, will be protection and improvement of the diversity and vigor of vegetative resources on public land in the sub-region over time. Other foreseeable impacts include private land development and fragmentation, and local drought conditions. These impacts could have direct and indirect impacts to these public lands.

The impacts of the proposed action when considered in addition to the existing noxious weeds in the general area would not increase the risk of noxious weed invasion.

Grazing livestock on these public lands is cumulative to other multiple uses along the Arkansas River which is very heavily used by public recreationists. Grazing in the manner of the proposed action however will sustain riparian function as plants retain the entire growing season to maintain their vigor and trampling and erosion is not a substantial issue.

The Proposed Action would be cumulative over what is already happening along the Arkansas River. Currently, most of the impact to soils in this area is related to recreation along the river. The addition of these changes would have an immeasurable impact on the soils in the area as a whole.

CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Please see Interdisciplinary Team Review list for BLM Participants

4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED

CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2014-0037 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

RATIONALE:

Context:

The EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze transfer of grazing preference and new grazing authorization, changes to the grazing schedule on the Wellsville Allotment and new range improvements on the Browns Canyon, Hecla Junction West and Park Ditch Allotments.

The Proposed Action alternative authorizes:

1. Authorize splitting a small portion of the Browns Canyon Allotment to a new allotment and authorization.
2. Authorize the future development of the Chaffee County Spring South and Muck Spring located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotments. Further NEPA would be conducted on these springs with details.
3. Authorize the construction of the Pinion Hills boundary fence and water developments on the Park Ditch Allotment.
4. Authorize the change in the grazing season of use on the Wellsville Allotment.

The allotments are located in Chaffee and Fremont County, Colorado at an elevation between 7,000 and 8,500 feet and consist of rugged pinyon-juniper forests with open grassland parks. The allotments are essential to the permittee's livestock operation and economic wellbeing.

Intensity:

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Salida East Grazing Authorization, Permit Modification and New Range Improvements Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:

Through the land health assessments and environmental analysis, adverse impacts to the allotments and the environment can be managed and mitigated. The benefits of these analyses that are reflected in the proposed action consist of proper grazing management practices. Grazing use on the vegetation is limited to a short period thereby allowing for plant rest and recovery.

Utilization restrictions are in place to protect the soil resources and provide forage and cover for wildlife. The new water developments will promote improved livestock management on the allotment and could be a resource to wildlife in the area. The allotments are meeting BLM Land Health Standards.

Direct impacts to or destruction of fossils would occur from unmitigated activities conducted on formations with high potential for important scientific fossil resources. Indirect impacts would involve damage or loss of fossil resources due to the unauthorized collection of scientifically important fossils by workers or the public due to increased access to fossil localities in the Project Area. Adverse impacts to important fossil resources would be long-term and significant since fossils removed or destroyed would be lost to science.

Public health and safety:

The proposed action reflects analyses and management practices that do the most to protect important water supplies by preventing erosion and sediment production. Due to the dry, upland nature of a portion of the allotment being analyzed, sediment production, from a water quality standpoint, is the biggest concern from grazing. The proposed action would leave sufficient ground cover present to protect the soils from eroding and downstream waters would not be affected from grazing on public lands.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area:

Portions of the Browns Canyon allotment and the Park Ditch allotment are in areas found to possess wilderness characteristics per the updated inventory conducted in 2013. The structures identified in the proposed action are not within the areas with wilderness characteristics therefore there would be no impact to this resource and further analysis is not needed.

A portion of the proposed action is within the Brown's Canyon WSA and the Brown's Canyon ACEC. Actions identified are administrative in nature and would not affect the wilderness qualities of the WSA or special values of the ACEC.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:

Analysis for grazing management is a common action conducted under NEPA. Conditions and impacts will vary and be unique to each allotment. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects of the action on resource values.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

BLM has a long history of managing public lands for multiple-use. Grazing is one part of that multiple-use mandate. Given the BLM's institutional knowledge on this subject, all risks were considered in the EA and were found to be neither unique nor unknown.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts: The proposed action is a modification to grazing management in that there is comprehensive review of all resource values and land health standards are either met or exceeded. This decision is like one of many that have previously been made and will continue to be made by BLM responsible officials regarding grazing management on public lands. The decision is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a

precedent for future actions. The decision does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: In general, the allotments in this analysis area are adjacent to private and state lands. The modifications and new projects as described on public lands will in part help promote meeting Standards for public land health. This action will not create any new cumulative impacts to the existing situation and given BLMs intense management practices, the action could contribute to enhancing land health and productivity.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Prehistoric sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect [see Reports CR-RG-14-024 (P) and CR-RG-14-112 (N)]. Although 5CF2939 and 5CF2940 were recorded during the cultural resources inventory, they are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and do not qualify as historic properties. Therefore, no historic properties will be affected by the proposed undertaking.

Additionally, Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted within grazing allotments slated for administrative changes (Browns Canyon, Stone Bridge, and Wellsville), and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment areas. Based on the information collected during the literature review, it was determined that no historic properties would be impacted by the proposed undertaking.

Lastly, the proposed action includes an authorization the future development of two springs located on the Browns Canyon and Hecla Junction West Allotments. However, the specific locations of the springs have not been determined, and will be analyzed specifically in one or more forthcoming Determinations of NEPA Adequacy. Accordingly, the specific location of the springs and the potential for cultural resources and subsequent impacts will be analyzed at that time.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat: Peregrine falcons are no longer a T&E species but are considered BLM sensitive species. Peregrine falcons could be expected to use the project area but there are no known eyries in the analysis area. A golden eagle nest is present within the Stone Bridge allotment, but the proposed action will not cause an adverse effect. There are no known records of BLM sensitive plant species in the area. No impacts are anticipated to TES Species based on analysis of the proposed action.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: Jeff Williams

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Sara L. Dawson

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 1/12/15

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 1/26/15

APPENDICES:

ATTACHMENTS: